

## LIGHTS! CAMERA!! ACTION!!!

### VIEWS ON EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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#### ABSTRACT

*This paper puts forth how theatre /drama, which is one of the methodologies of experiential learning can be used as an effective communication tool to enhance communication skills in students of higher learning institutes. The nation's competitiveness is created by the technical and non-technical skills possessed by the youth of the country. Higher education plays a critical role in shaping these skills. Up skilling can be done through various methods. Experiential learning is just one of them. Experiential learning is different from rote or traditional forms of learning. Simply put, it is learning through experience. It surpasses discipline-specific skills and extends towards skills necessary to succeed in life as well as the corporate world. Grounded in experience, it not only increases communication skills but also leads to active reflection by learners. Soft skills today are valued skills. The methodology used is qualitative content analysis.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Communication, Theatre, Techniques & Higher Education*

Original Article 1

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#### INTRODUCTION

Presently, India constitutes 140 million youngsters who will be entering college or graduating from them. By 2030, India will be amongst the youngest nations in the world (FICCI Higher Education Summit 2013). The higher education landscape has leapfrogged in the past twenty years. Learning outcomes are structured and corporate requirements are kept in mind while designing them.

The nation's competitiveness is created by the technical and non-technical skills possessed by the youth of the country. Higher education plays a critical role in shaping these skills. Up-skilling can be done through various methods. Soft skills today are valued skills. Soft skills are a combination of the four Cs: communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. *Soft Skills for Business Success* reports that two-thirds of jobs will be "soft skills intensive" by 2030, compared to half of all jobs in 2000.(Delloitte, 2017)The Seattle Jobs Initiative in 2013 reported that 75 percent of the businesses surveyed rated soft skills as equally important or more important than technical skills for securing employment(Jennifer Pritchard,2017)

The growth and development of soft skills are leaning towards an intra-curricular approach in institutions of higher learning. Teaching methodologies which promote, experiential learning, role play and demonstration, team projects/group work, case studies and problem-solving tasks increase the students 'on cognitive and communication abilities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

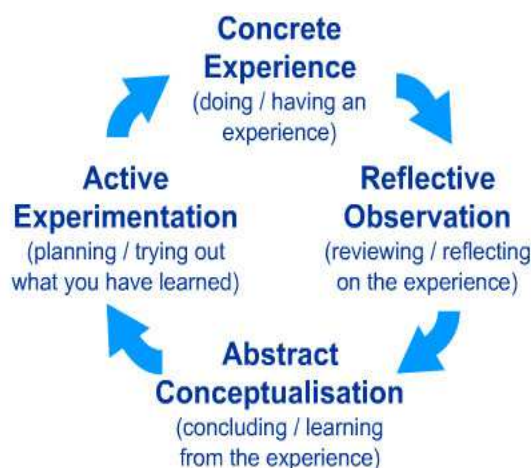
### Experiential Learning

Improving the quality of higher education needs a relook at the different and innovative ways in which experiential learning can be incorporated into the curriculum.

Boud and Pascoe (1978) suggested that experiential education has the following characteristics: Each student is involved, the learning activity corresponds in some way to the world outside the classroom, and the learner has control over her or his learning experience. Experiential education involves students in ways lecture cannot.

Students seeking higher education can relate to what they are learning in a course to practical experience in a workplace setting. This is the key takeaway of an experiential learning course. As students reflect on the linkage between higher education training and their worldly realities, reflection becomes a source for their own personal development (Kolb, 1984).

Learning is a captivating process. Individual learning styles and methods vary from one individual to another. David Kolb propounded the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) and it is still one of the most widely used learning models. The basis of ELT is that a person learns from direct experience or “Learns by Doing Let’s try to understand Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle in figure 1



Source: Kolb (1974), <https://www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html>

**Figure 1: Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle (1974) and Learning Styles**

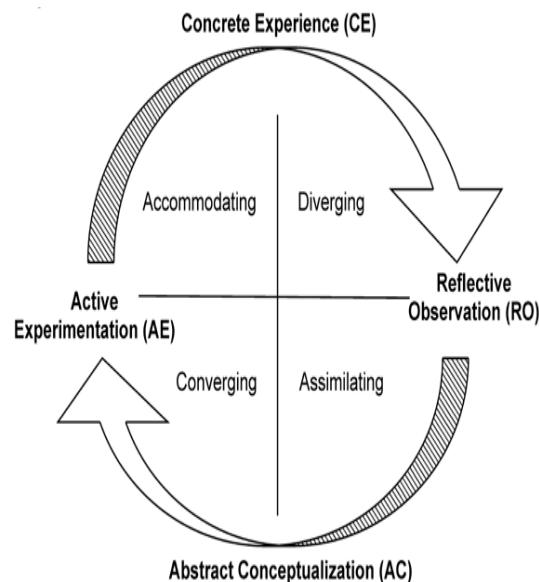
- **Concrete Experience** – a situation met becomes a new experience or understanding an existing experience in a different way
- **Reflective Observation of the New Experience** – discrepancy may appear between experience and understanding
- **Abstract Conceptualization** – reflection creates a new understanding of an idea. This could also lead to the alteration of an already existing abstract concept. Learning has happened from that experience.
- **Active Experimentation** – An application of ideas to real-world situations

Kolb's experiential learning theory posits a four-stage cycle of learning. Kolb stresses on the learner’s internal cognitive processes. Kolb states that learning includes the achievement of abstract concepts that can be applied malleably

to an array of situations. In Kolb's theory, the motivation for the development of new concepts is provided by new experiences, which can be created by reflective observation and active experimentation. "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience"

According to Kolb, (1974) learning is an integrated process with each stage being equally supportive and each stage feeding into the next one. However, effective learning only occurs when all four stages of the model are executed by the learner. All four stages are interconnected and not standalone stages. "Reflecting on practice has become an element of professional competence required to bridge the theoretical and practical gap in any profession (Mann, et. al, 2009).

There are different learning styles which have been again identified by Kolb. A student learning style is influenced by several factors. Amongst which, the social environment in which he has grown up in, his educational experience, and the cognitive structure of the individual are a few factors which influence students learning behavior and style. The learning style is a product of two pairs of variables as indicated in the table below. Refer Figure 2



Source: Amended from <https://www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html>

**Figure 2: A Grid Representing Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycles and Learning Styles**

**Table 1**

	Active Experimentation (Doing)	Reflective Observation (Watching)
Concrete Experience (Feeling)	<b>Accommodating (CE/AE)</b> Processing is feeling and doing. Believes in doing things hands-on rather than logic	<b>Diverging (CE/RO)</b> Processing is feeling and watching. Believes in working in groups and are idea generators
Abstract Conceptualization (Thinking)	<b>Converging (AC/AE)</b> Processing is Thinking and doing perception continuum. Believes in task orientation and are problem solvers	<b>Assimilating (AC/RO)</b> Processing is Thinking and watching. Believes in less focus on people and more on task

## Communication

Communication skills encompasses verbal, nonverbal, technical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, oral, written, formal, informal, visual, and electronic competencies.

Communication skills are soft skills which are desirable skills, employers look out for. Stakeholders in education have realized the importance of these skills. There is a reflection of employer perspectives on the applied skills and foundational knowledge present in graduates entering the 21st-century workforce with a recognized need for communication skills (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). OECD has touted communication as an essential higher-order skill that must be developed for success in the modern workforce (Fadel, 2012).

Drama/Theatre is especially suited to experiential education. It is a powerful mode that can draw students into an experience; it is a tool “to help move the management learning experience from the lecture platform into the interactive, participative, doing phases” (Mockler, 2002, p. 575). As more management educators adopt an experiential learning approach, the use of arts-based learning techniques increases and drama is one teaching tool whose use is steadily growing (Nissley, 2002). The use of dramatic arts—stage performance (e.g., theater, role-playing) and screen performance (e.g., cinema, film)—have been used to teach a variety of topics (e.g., Champoux, 1999, 2000, 2001; Mockler, 2002; Nissley, 2002) including business ethics (Brown, 1994), decision making (Holtom, Mickel, & Boggs, 2003), organizational change (Varney & McFillen, 2000), negotiations (Weiss, 2003), Organizational behavior (Golden-Biddle, 1993), whistle-blowing (Comer & Vega, 2006), environmental awareness (Tucker & Tromley, 2005), multistakeholder decision making (Egri, 1999), emotional intelligence (Morris, Urbanski, & Fuller, 2005), and general management (Crossan, 1998; Mockler, 2002; Monks, Barker, & Mhanachain, 2001; Moshavi, 2001). It is one of the cheapest media available, it does not rely on literacy, it can be more flexible and topical than other media, and above all the audience can participate in the play, making the theatre a genuine two-way medium for communicating information (Kasoma, 1974)

### **Theatrical Techniques and their Educational Impact**

Performance needs to engage and activate the audience, apart from communicating. A speaker’s job is never merely to deliver information but to create influence based on an important message that requires embodying the techniques of effective performance. To mention a few; body language, role play, improvisation, mirroring, simulations, storytelling, props, music, vocal dynamics, beats and intentions, freeze frame, monologue, hot seat...The list is endless !! These techniques are used to create and develop and communicate plays and characters that will be of interest to the audience.

Amongst experiential learning methodologies, drama techniques offer an efficient alternative to rote learning. Real life situations are experienced without actually undertaking risks. According to Schechner (1985) the “finding of ways to collaborate by sharing tasks and playing certain roles. Once the task has been fulfilled, individual products are integrated into a whole” Multiple and diverse skills are put to use here. The students’ play the role of a child to their parents, the role of a schoolmate, the role of brother or sister, the role of an employee, employer etc. All these roles may be played simultaneously, intersecting each other, remaining independent or in conflict. Role-playing is a technique often used in communication. Campbell, Campbell, and Dickinson suggest the fact that, unlike the method of formal drama (the staging of a play), the “method of role-playing provides more freedom in learning and creation. This method also brings, besides enhanced learning, development in building relations, intra- and interpersonal communication skills” (apud Pâni, 2006, p. 371).

Drama also facilitates the synthesizing the knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviors of the learners from various domains. It also builds team skills and to develop creative thinking skills. Rote learning or the lecture method may not be effective here.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The primary objective of this paper is to analyze how drama/theatre can (experiential learning )build communication skills in students of higher learning.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Qualitative Research Methodology has been used to analyze this paper. Qualitative content has been extracted from the literature review of various sources. A systemic search of research papers from known databases has been made. Also newspaper articles, websites, and journals have been referred to and analyzed.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

The concept of theatre has gone beyond aesthetic practice. Drama is about acting, it is about playing a role and it is about storytelling. Drama accomplishes a variety of goals, including developing communication skills. They are a crucial part of our everyday life and are also a shared need for all careers.

### **Develops Language Skills**

Drama can augment professional language skills by means of role play. When students role plays certain corporate situations, they develop professional language skills. They also indirectly develop their vocabulary.

### **Spontaneous Conversation**

Drama simulates spontaneous conversation. Business keywords are reinforced and enacted when students use different techniques in drama.

### **Problem Solving**

Communication through drama assists students to use language to solve problems, carry out an effective conversation, and make decisions. Creativity is fostered by enabling them to take on different roles and to get into different situations and issues from various business contexts. It also enhances creative expression without being bound by what is right and wrong.

### **Confidence and Trust**

There is a marked improvement in confidence levels, trust, and self-esteem amongst students participating in dramas for the purpose of communication. This will lower inhibitions and encourage risk-taking. Verbal flexibility, improvisation, mirroring; these tools can be effectively used to build the self-esteem of students.

### **Nonverbal Communication**

Drama creates a platform where nonverbal skills are developed by the students. Body language forms a very important component of communication skills. While practicing for the drama, students can internalize nonverbal skills. Body emotion and language add to the meaning of communication.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

As part of an educational and organizational process, theatre can play a range of roles: bringing people together and creating contexts for collective reflection and action; drawing out participation and expression of popular concerns,

and analysis; overcoming people's fears and rationalizations and building confidence and identity; stimulating discussion and a critical understanding of problems, contradictions, and structures underlining everyday reality; clarifying the possibilities and strategies for action; stirring people's emotions and mobilizing people for action. (Warritay, 1988). The process of learning from an experience sums up experiential learning. In this article, an attempt is made to bring out the salient features of facilitating the subject of communication through drama/theatre and how it can be used effectively to build a learners life skills, make him corporate ready and also help him to develop himself in a well-rounded manner.

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